(c) whether Government have taken steps to keep the ASI on constant alert; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and the steps that will be taken to ensure that there is immediate response to complaints against devastation of ancient monuments in the country?

THE MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY): (a) No Sir, Archaeological Survey of India responds urgently to such representations in respect of all protected monuments.

(b) No sir, as stated above, prompt action is taken on such representations.

(c) and (d) Do not arise.

Development in NER

627. SHRI KARENDU BHATTACHARJEE: Will the Minister of DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH-EASTERN REGION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Prime Minister, during his recent visit to Assam, has firmly stated that Centre is committed for improving the road, rail and air connectivity and also the tele-communication network in the North-Eastern Region;

(b) if so, how the required finance is expected to be arranged for implementation of the commitment; and

(c) whether there is any time-frame for the much needed improvement?

THE MINISTER OF THE MINISTRY OF DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH EASTERN REGION (SHRI P.R. KYNDIAH): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) and (c) Specific steps taken by the concerned Ministries/ Departments for improving the road, rail and air connectivity, tele-communication network and media coverage in the North-Eastern Region are as under:

(i) Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has proposed to implement "Special Accelerated Road Development Programme" for improving the road connectivity in the North Eastern Region for which a special allocation has been proposed in the budget for 2005-06. Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region

has received ADB assistance for commencing a study of the existing road network in the North East.

(ii) For improving rail connectivity, it has been decided that additional funds to the tune of Rs. 1013 crore over and above the normal budgetary support would be provided for the Lumding-Silchar-Jiribam gauge conversion project during 2005-06 so as to complete the project by March, 2009. It has also been decided to declare "Lumding-Silchar-Jiribam" gauge conversion project as a National Project.

(iii) The DG, Civil Aviation has issued "Route Dispersal Guidelines" to ensure air connectivity to all regions of the country including the North Eastern Region. Indian Airlines and its subsidiary Alliance Air have taken special measures to ensure connectivity in the North East. 4 ATR aircrafts for operating exclusively within the North Eastern States have been leased. The North Eastern Council has been supporting this project by providing a budgetary support of Rs. 35 crore per annum to the Alliance Air. The Airports Authority of India has taken up projects for improvement of airport infrastructure in the North Eastern States which include strengthening of runway, apron, etc. at Imphal, Agartala, Silchar and Dibrugarh and installation of Instrument Landing System (ILS) at Dimapur. The total cost of these projects is Rs. 130.20 crore. Indian Airlines have introduced a bi-weekly Guwahati-Bangkok flight from January 1st, 2005.

(iv) For improvement of tele-communications in the North East, Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) has provided for Rs. 500 crore and Rs. 528 crore for 2004-05 and 2005-06 respectively. Apart from BSNL, two private telecom operators have also been given licenses for operarting telecom services in the Region. Financial support is also being provided to the operators for rural telephone through the Universal Service Obligations Funds.

(v) For enhancing media coverage, a scheme for improving the services of All India Radio and Doordarshan in the North Eastern Region and Island Territories has been proposed which would form a part of the 10th Five-Year-Plan. This scheme is in the process of approval.